

March 7, 2011

To: Members of the Committee on Environment

Re: In Support of H.B. 5203 AN ACT AUTHORIZING AN AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION EASEMENT ON THE LANDS OF THE SOUTHBURY TRAINING SCHOOL.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee: My name is Tom Crider and I'm President of the Southbury Land Trust. I'm here to speak in favor of the bill, and to suggest two amendments.

I concur with others testifying today regarding the importance to our State of preserving farmland and there's no need for me to repeat the many excellent reasons for doing so.

The Southbury Land Trust is a non-profit organization whose mission is to preserve farmland and other open space. As such we would qualify to be holders of the conservation easement authorized by this Bill. We currently own or hold easements on seven farms in Southbury. Because of its significance as the largest unprotected property in our area, we've been advocating the preservation of the farmland at the Training School for several years.

For your reference I've attached a map showing the current land uses on the Training School land. As you can see from the map, the property consists of more than 1,400A. Only about 250 of those acres are used by the School, leaving more than 1,100A of what's referred to on the map as "agricultural" and "undeveloped" land.

The 618A shown as "agricultural" contain a high proportion of prime and state-wide important farmland soils, making this land exceptionally well suited to agriculture. The size of this property and the quality of its soils make it a key to the survival of agriculture in the region. The State has invested millions of dollars over the past decade protecting farmland like this. Now, with this Bill, a regionally important property can be preserved at no cost.

Last year the CT Farmland Preservation Advisory Bd. recommended preserving the agricultural land at the Training School as well as at 5 other state-owned properties. HB 5203 would be a very significant first step toward this broader goal.

In directing the Farmland Preservation Advisory Board to study state-owned farmland properties, Special Act 09-8 defined "agricultural land" as having the same meaning as in section 22-26bb of the general statutes. This brings me to our first suggested amendment to HB 5203:

We think it's important to be clear that the term "agricultural lands" can, and in this case should, include more than the land that is currently used for crops or pastureland. Using the definition in the general statutes, the land shown as "undeveloped" on the attached map would be considered agricultural.

Specifically, the third sentence of Section 1(a) of the Bill states that the easement “shall allow for the conservation of the subject land as agricultural land...” but does not further explain what constitutes “agricultural land”. We think it would be helpful, for clarity’s sake, to refer to the definition of “agricultural land” which is already contained in the general statutes. Section 22-26bb of the general statutes makes it clear that “agricultural land” includes not only land suitable for raising crops but also “adjacent pastures, wooded land, natural drainage areas and other adjacent open areas”. The agricultural land at the Southbury Training School does in fact contain such adjacent areas. The Bill already defines the word “agriculture” by referring to the definition of “agriculture” contained in section 1-1 of the general statutes. We believe that including a definition of “agricultural land” is consistent with this approach and necessary for clarity.

PROPOSED AMENDMENT: We propose that the third sentence of Section 1(a) of the Bill be amended by inserting, after the words “agricultural land”, the phrase “, as defined in section 22-26bb of the general statutes,”.

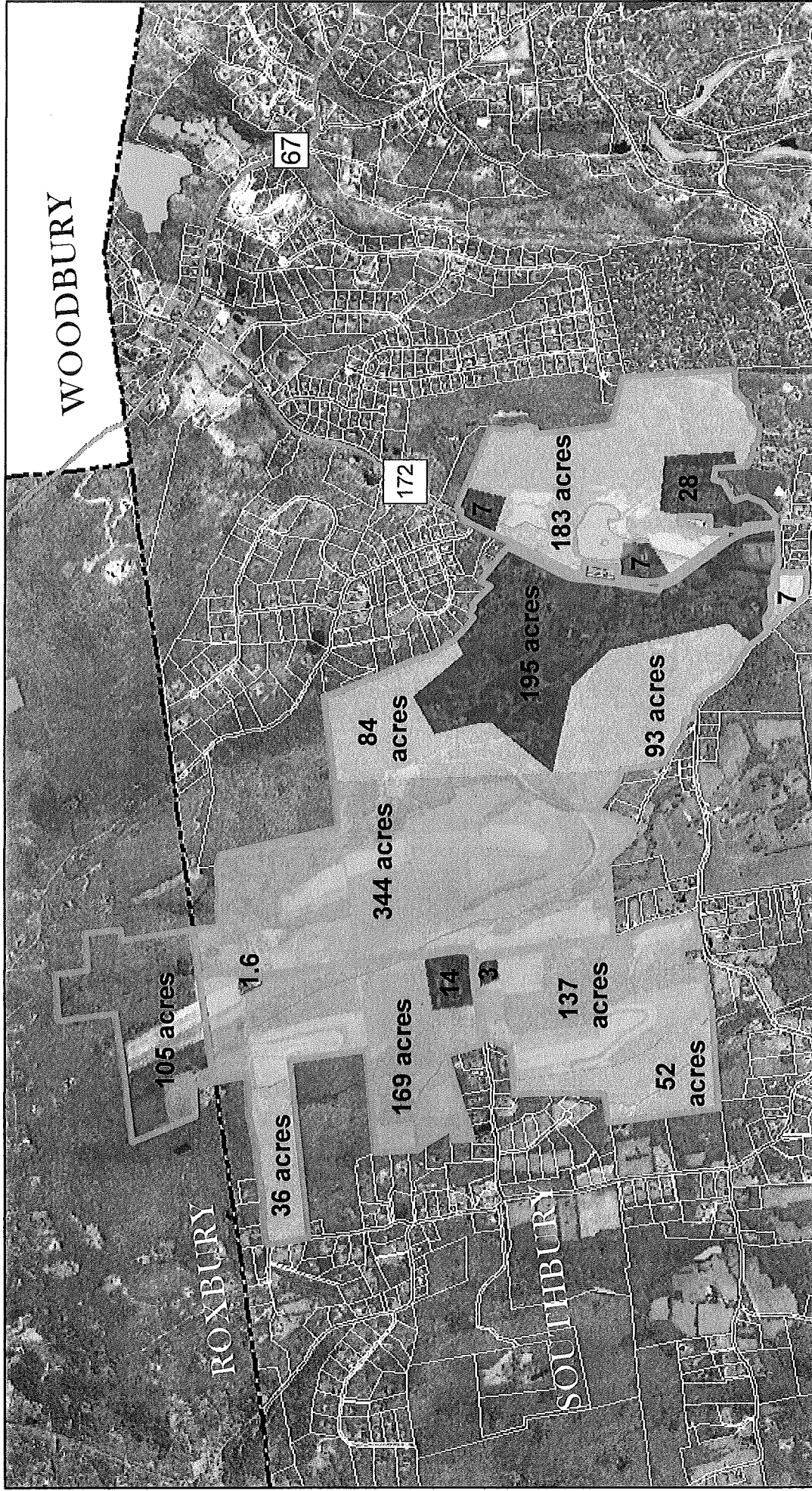
Secondly, as you can see from the attached map, 105A of the Training School land is located in the Town of Roxbury.

PROPOSED AMENDMENT: We propose that the first sentence of Section 1(a) of the Bill be amended by inserting, after the words “land located in the town of Southbury”, the words “and Roxbury.”

This Bill, with the above amendments, will be a significant step toward preserving an important agricultural property and insuring the viability of agriculture in the State. Best of all, this can be done at no cost. Speaking for the Board of Trustees of the Southbury Land Trust, I urge passage of HB 5203.

Thank you for your consideration.

Southbury Training School Land Use 2010



Acreage was calculated using ArcGIS and is only an approximation.

Southbury Training School

Landuse type

- Agriculture
- Community Facility
- Utilities
- Undeveloped

Agriculture 650 acres
Undeveloped 456
Community Facility 255
Utility 2

Base Map information from Town of Southbury Parcel Layer and DEP Aerials are AT&T 2006
For general planning use only. Delineations may not be exact.



